

**Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman**  
**H.Con.Res. 460**  
**June 23, 2004**

Mr. Speaker. I rise in strong support of H.Con.Res. 460 and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's proposed disengagement plan to remove settlements and certain military outposts from Gaza and areas of the West Bank.

This initiative gives hope for the future of the peace process and the effort to end the suffering of the Israeli and Palestinian people.

Since putting forth a bold peace initiative at Camp David in 2000, the Israeli side has endured years of terrorist attacks that have taken the lives of nearly 1,000 civilians. Israeli troops are now reengaged in Palestinian areas they once hoped they had left for good.

Among Palestinians there is also despair. Instead of taking the measures to pursue statehood and independence, the Palestinian leadership has recruited their children for suicide attacks, and weakened their economy with corruption and the siphoning of funds for terrorist activities.

The disengagement plan presents a much needed opportunity to reduce tensions, make Israel more secure, and give the Palestinian people an opportunity for self-governance. The proposal will also set the stage for future negotiations by putting pressure on the Palestinian leadership to undertake the internal economic and political reforms necessary to improve quality of life and build the institutions for statehood.

I believe it is equally important that in endorsing the Sharon initiative on April 14, the President also underscored two fundamental realities to be taken into consideration once final status negotiations ultimately resume. First, that the open-ended Palestinian claim to a right of return for refugees is demographically untenable for Israel's future as a Jewish state. And second that existing demographics need to be taken into account in future negotiations to provide Israel with secure, recognized, and defensible borders and provide the territory for a Palestinian state.

Some say a clear U.S. position on these issues prejudices the outcome of the negotiations, but these realities are the very same principles that guided the peace effort initiated by President Clinton at Camp David. Those negotiations failed not because of the U.S. position, but because Yasser Arafat responded to Israel's offer with terrorism and violence instead of full-faith negotiations.

The Israeli and Palestinian people deserve a better future. I urge my colleagues to support his resolution and the commitment of the United States to remain engaged and stand prepared to broker a final status agreement when a credible and willing Palestinian leadership prepared to embrace peace emerges.